REVIEWS

William Beveridge—A Biography. By José Harris

This excellent biography gives a very full picture of a varied career. Beveridge was successively sub-Warden of Toynbee Hall, a journalist, a civil servant (where he was a Permanent Secretary before the age of 40), director of the London School of Economics, master of University College, Oxford, the author of a famous report on Social Insurance and Allied Services, a Liberal MP and a member of the House of Lords. Dr Harris has not only set out the facts of that career, but she has put them in the context of the gradual development of Beveridge's thought. This cannot have been easy, for Beveridge, though he prided himself on his rational approach to political and social questions, could at times be remarkably inconsistent, and he was often motivated as much by his emotions as by his reason. Dr Harris also brings out in a gradual but effective way the contradictions of his character—immensely industrious and able, vain, quirky, quarrelsome, skilled in devising administrative machinery but a poor administrator himself because of his difficulties in personal relationships with those around him, a social reformer whose zeal was based on no particular credo and who had no great liking for the 'common man' who might benefit from his reforms. Everyone interested in the social history of this century should read this book.

Actuaries will naturally have a special interest in the chapters on the famous 'Beveridge Report', which made such an impact when it was published in 1942, just as the Battle of Alamein marked a turning point in the Second World War. It is therefore unfortunate that this section of the book is the least well documented, for Beveridge's correspondence with the other members of his Committee has largely been lost. Nevertheless, what remains makes a fascinating story. Beveridge was appointed Chairman of the Committee principally because Ernest Bevin was determined to remove him from the Ministry of Labour, where he had gone at the outbreak of war. His Committee consisted entirely of civil servants and the Government clearly expected it to be concerned mainly with technical matters, with the idea of bringing some order to the jungle of the various existing social insurance schemes. Beveridge had other ideas and embarked on a wide-ranging review of national social policy. As a result the other members of the Committee were put in an impossible position, for as civil servants they could not commit their ministers on such important policy matters, so they became 'advisors and assessors', though even as such complained that Beveridge did not adequately consider their views. As a result Beveridge largely wrote the report himself and he alone signed it.

It seems almost incredible now that a period of less than 18 months elapsed from the setting up of the Committee to the publication of the report—a typical example of Beveridge's industry. Though the report clearly played an important part in paving the way for the setting up in 1948 of a comprehensive national insurance scheme and of a national health service, Beveridge was bitterly disappointed that his report was not adopted lock, stock and barrel and that he himself was given no part in the administration of the new systems. Despite that, his name will live on as one of the authors of the welfare state, even though later generations may well wonder why the publication of his report should have raised such a furore.

Leslie V. Martin

Scottish Population History. Edited By Michael Flinn.
[Cambridge University Press, 1978]

Seven years work by a team of researchers with an army of volunteer helpers who 'devilled' for them at New Register House have produced a remarkable study of the demography of Scotland between 1600 and the 1930s. The book is a summary of the work, a triumph of arrangement and balance proceeding at a measured pace of about 100 pages per century, without bias towards any period. The sources used are described and criticized, particularly the uneven evidence (in time and place) of parish registers and the 'private' censuses made from time to time. An economic indicator based on
grain prices for the period up to the middle of the nineteenth century is given, together with a regional mortality index based upon relative burial frequency for the same period.

The social history of post-medieval Scotland is surveyed as an explanation or check upon the conclusions to be drawn from the statistics. Thus seventeenth-century Scotland suffered recurrent mortality crises from famine and plague, whereas later on an improved economy, trading communications and the acts of benevolent individuals and organizations lessened the impact of both natural and man-made disasters. Substantial migration to Ulster was succeeded by emigration to Canada, and immigration in turn from Ireland. The effects of severe weather and of individual diseases are traced, and there are interesting studies of the prevalence of illegitimacy, of the reasons for high fertility in the Western Lowlands and the evidence for family limitation in the Highlands in the nineteenth century. The cholera and typhus epidemics, and the consequences of the Scots potato famine are studied; the steep decline in mortality between 1860 and 1880 may have been due to the slackening pace of urbanization.

It has been fashionable to deride the more esoteric research topics funded by the Social Science Research Council: here is evidence of money very well spent in bringing together a vast amount of invaluable demographic material, and making it available for further researchers.

D. F. RENN

Review Notes

The World Health Organization has recently produced two demographic manuals. The *Manual of Mortality Analysis* (principal editor H. Campbell) describes the sources, collection and analysis of population data, statistical measures of mortality, life tables, infant mortality, mortality over time, differential mortality and causes of death (including specific problems in their analysis). *Life Table and Mortality Analysis* by Chin Long Chiang is a more advanced manual, dealing with probability theory, the adjustment of death rates and their standard error, the construction of full and abridged life tables and underlying statistical theory and inference and multiple decrement tables, the theory of competing risks and medical follow-up studies.

The seventh edition of *Statistics in Theory and Practice* by L. R. Connor and A. J. H. Morell has been published (see *J.I.A.* 91, 351) with a new appendix on the use of computers in data-processing work.

*Special Functions of Applied Mathematics*, by B. C. Carlson (Academic Press 1977) adopts an historic approach to the gamma, beta and certain hypergeometric functions (e.g. Bessel, Gauss and Chebyshev). The chapters are accompanied by notes, formulary and exercises, with notes on their solution.